PUBLIC EDUCATION AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

7.1 During the year, my Office mounted a diversified multi-media programme of public information and education :

- to reach out to our community;
- to publicise our services;
- to promote a positive complaint culture among Hong Kong people; and
- to foster a culture of service among public officers.

PUBLICITY

7.2 From experience, the most effective means of publicity is the mass media. We have an "Announcement of Public Interest" (API) or short film clip for broadcast on our local TV with a sound track for radio to advise the public on what, where and how to lodge complaints with The Ombudsman.

7.3 Other publicity efforts include posters, leaflets, roving exhibitions, advertising on buses and information panels in railway stations and carriages. From September to November 2002, we launched publicity to coincide with our removal to the new office. The purpose was to ensure that the public

Fig. 7.1 Roving exhibitions

Fig. 7.2 Advertising on buses

visit the right place for our services and not suffer inconvenience from ignorance of our whereabouts.

7.4 I attend interviews with media reporters on an *ad hoc* basis. The aim is to maintain public awareness of our institution and our services.

7.5 "Ombuds News", our periodical newsletter, announces selected anonymised investigation reports as well as our new initiatives and recent developments. We release them on a regular basis at media conferences and usually attract good coverage. Such media reports help to inform our community of improvement to public organisations, supported by actual examples.

Fig. 7.3 Ombuds News

Fig.7.4 Press conferences held in 2002/03

17 May 2002

- Announcement of direct investigation report into Education Department's contingency and relief measures for the secondary school places allocation exercise 2001.
- Declaration of two direct investigations into:
  - the administration of vehicle registration marks auctions.
  - the role of Home Affairs Department in facilitating the formation of Owners' Corporations.

3 July 2002

- Announcement of 14th Annual Report of The Ombudsman.
- Announcement of two anonymised complaint investigation reports.

13 August 2002

- Announcement of direct investigation report into the funding of sports programmes by Hong Kong Sports Development Board.
- Announcement of two anonymised complaint investigation reports.

4 October 2002

- Announcement of direct investigation report into the administration of vehicle registration marks auctions.
- Announcement of an anonymised complaint investigation report.
- Declaration of direct investigation into the operation of the Integrated Call Centre.

29 November 2002

- Announcement of direct investigation report into the mechanism for handling missing patients in Hospital Authority hospitals.
- Announcement of two anonymised complaint investigation reports.
- Declaration of direct investigation into the enforcement of the Education Ordinance on universal basic education.

27 February 2003

- Announcement of direct investigation report into the monitoring of charitable fund-raising activities.
- Announcement of two anonymised complaint investigation reports.

27 March 2003

- Announcement of direct investigation report into the role of Home Affairs Department in facilitating the formation of Owners' Corporations
- Announcement of an anonymised complaint investigation report.

Meeting with Legislative Councillors

7.6 We continued our liaison with major public and community organisations. I attended a meeting with Members of the Legislative Council in December 2002 to update them on our developments and initiatives.

Meeting with Chairmen of District Councils

7.7 Following the success in 2002, I organised another joint meeting with the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of District Councils in February 2003 with the assistance of the Permanent Secretary for Home Affairs. The meeting enabled me to explain our functions to district leaders, update them on developments and to exchange views on issues of common concern. I appreciate their keen interest in our work and their ready support for our cause.

Assistance from Justices of the Peace

7.8 The Justices of the Peace (JPs) Assistance Scheme was launched in 1996 to promote understanding of the work of this Office. At present, 374 JPs have enrolled. Some have participated actively in visits organised by this Office. We appreciate their warm support and their suggestions on various aspects of our services.

7.9 During the reporting period, we arranged four orientation visits for the JPs — one to the Stonecutters Island Sewage Treatment Works of the Drainage Services Department, two visits to the Airport Terminal of the Customs and Excise Department and one to the Public Health Laboratory Centre of Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. Participants found these visits useful in enhancing their insight into different facets of Government activity.

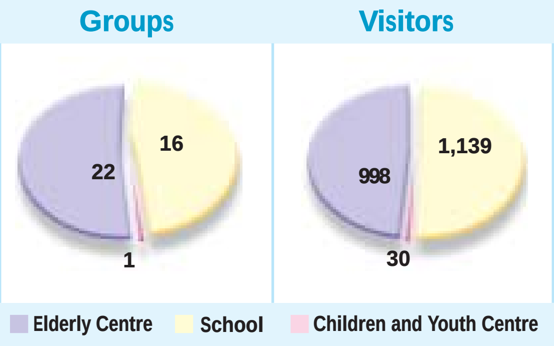
Fig. 7.5 JPs visiting the Customs and Excise Department

Resource Centre

7.10 We welcome individuals and community groups to visit our Resource Centre, which houses a rich collection of Ombudsman-related literature. A group visit normally comprises a tour to the Centre, followed by a briefing and exchange of views with representatives of this Office. For the younger visitors, we are producing an interactive computer game for their education and entertainment at the conclusion of their visit. This game takes the form of quiz aimed at enhancing understanding of the work of this Office. The game, expected to be available in May 2003, will be posted in our website and will be available as CD-ROM for distribution to visitors. A total of 2,167 persons from 39 groups visited the Centre in the reporting year, compared to 3,101 and 66 respectively in the previous year. In view of the office removal, we closed the Centre in August and September 2002. In March 2003, most

scheduled visits had to be cancelled as a result of the onset of SARS. These account for the drop in the number of visits to the Centre.

Fig. 7.6 Group Visits to Resource Centre



Information Videos

7.11 In 1998, we produced a ten-minute video in the form of a drama to introduce our work. With jurisdictional changes and the expansion of our activities[4] , we have decided to produce a new video. This is expected to be available later in 2003.

7.12 Meanwhile, the video produced in 2001 on our telephone complaint service is still in service.

The Ombudsman Awards

7.13 *For organisations* — In recognition of the professional and positive approach to complaint management by public organisations, Ombudsman Awards have been introduced since July 1997. Organisations are adjudged on the basis of their handling of complaints referred to them by this Office and their commitment to improving the quality of their services, including implementation of The Ombudsman's recommendations. These annual awards are highly regarded as open acknowledgement of the organisations concerned as open and accountable. The awards have been well received by public organisations and the general public.

Fig. 7.7 Winning Organisations in 2002

- Leisure and Cultural Services Department (Grand Award)
- Immigration Department
- Social Welfare Department

7.14 *For individuals* — These annual awards are for individual public officers exemplary in achieving a good standard of customer service or have made significant contribution to improve the quality of public administration in handling complaints over a sustained period of time. Twenty-three public officers from 12 organisations received the awards during the reporting period.

4 Since 1998, 14 organisations have been added to, and 13 deleted from, Schedule 1 to The Ombudsman Ordinance. In 2001 we introduced the telephone complaints service and accepted complaints via e-mail.

Fig. 7.8 **Individual awards in 2002**

Organisation	No. of awardees
Customs & Excise Department	3
Education Department	1
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department	2
Hospital Authority	3
Housing Department	3
Immigration Department	2
Inland Revenue Department	3
Judiciary	1
Labour Department	1
Marine Department	1
Student Financial Assistance Agency	2
Water Supplies Department	1

7.15 Nominations for the awards in 2003 are underway.

Survey on Our Services

7.16 We keep our fingers on the pulse of our public from time to time for feedback to improve our services. With the assistance of the Census and Statistics Department, we initiated a survey in 1996 on public awareness of my Office and the effectiveness of our services. This was repeated in 1999/2000. Commencing in March 2003, about 8,000 households are enumerated. The report will be published later this year. The findings of the survey will assist us to gauge public expectations and to meet their aspirations for quality public administration. The report will also guide us in our public information and education strategies.

Complaint Management Workshop

7.17 Our annual Complaint Management Workshop has become a significant feature for our positive interface with public organisations. We had made considerable preparation for the event on 3 April 2003, firming up the programme and reserving the venue. By the end of March 2003, nearly 800 public officers had indicated their interest to attend. Regrettably, the workshop had to be postponed in view of SARS.

Induction and In-service Training

7.18 Complaint handling is now an integral part of public services. Most public officers, particularly for those in the frontline, have to deal with complaints in the course of their career and may even become subjects of complaint themselves. To meet their operational needs, we conduct talks for departmental recruits and serving officers. During the reporting year, we made ten addresses.

Fig. 7.9 **Briefing at Executive Officers Induction Course**

Chapter 7

INSTITUTIONAL LIAISON

7.19 My Office is a member of the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI). Successive Ombudsmen participate in international ombudsman activities. Since 1996(except 1999)The Hong Kong Ombudsman has been a Director of the IOI - representing the Australasian and Pacific region. In October 2002, I was elected Secretary to the IOI.

7.20 Apart from attending the Institute's Board of Directors' Meeting in Tunis, Republic of Tunisia, I attended in November 2002 the 20th Australasian and Pacific Ombudsman Conference of the Institute in Sydney, Australia and led a discussion on "Conducting Effective Investigations".

7.21 This Office is also a founding member of the Asian Ombudsman Association, of which I am also the Secretary. In May, I attended the 7th Association meeting in Beijing.

Fig. 7.10 The Ombudsman at the 7th Conference of the Asian Ombudsman Association

7.22 We have an exchange programme with the China Supervision Institute. In 2002, this Office sent a delegation to the Mainland in May and the Institute visited Hong Kong in December. Representatives of this Office also attended the 10th Anniversary Seminar of the Commission Against Corruption in the Macau Special Administrative Region, with which we maintain close liaison.

7.23 2002 saw a sharp increase in the number of visitors from Ombudsman institutions in overseas jurisdictions and representatives of the Ministry of Supervision of China. From time to time, groups of Mainland officials attend training courses in Hong Kong, which invariably include a half-day visit to this Office. Our directorate officers give talks to these visiting groups. During the reporting period, we received 42 overseas visitors, 133 representatives from the Ministry of Supervision and delivered talks to 15 other groups comprising 410 members. This compared to 11, 54, 13 and 354 respectively in 2001/02. We welcome such contacts and learn from the experience.